
Contentious Politics in Contemporary Russia: Protest Movement of 2011-2013*

Park, Soo-Heon**

- 개요 -

이 논문은 2011년 말-2013년 동안 러시아의 항의운동(protest movement)을 ‘분쟁정치(contentious politics)’의 관점에서 분석한다. 논문은 러시아에서 정치적 항의운동의 발흥과 전개를 살핌으로써 러시아 정치에 있어서 새로운 동력의 가능성을 탐구하고, 항의운동에 대한 푸틴정권의 다양한 대응 조치들을 검토한 후에 러시아 항의운동의 성과와 한계를 규명한다. 2011년 12월-2012년 5월 기간 동안에 러시아 항의운동은 높은 수준의 동원화 과정을 거쳤다. 푸틴 정권을 대상으로 한 일련의 항의 시위에 다수의 군중이 참여하였고, 기존 네트워크와 소셜 미디어를 통한 운동의 조직은 상당히 성공적으로 이루어졌다. 그러나 2012년 5월 6일 시위 이후 항의운동은 탈동원화 과정을 거치면서 참가자 규모와 적극성의 점진적 감소 과정을 겪었다. 여기에는 항의운동의 내부 분열과 대도시 집중이라는 운동 자체의 문제점들과 함께, 푸틴 정권의 다양한 대응정책 — 특히 억압과 제약 조치 — 이 주요 요인으로 작용했다. 러시아 사회가 대도시 주민과 그 외 지역으로 갈라지는 상황도 전반적으로 항의운동 지속에 불리한 배경을 이루었다. 러시아의 항의운동은 그것의 목적과 전략에 일정한 변화를 추구 — 점진적 정권 변화, 보다 구체적인 정치적, 경제적 요구 제시, 지역, 지방 수준으로 하향적 확장 — 함으로써 다시 활성화할 기회를 엿볼 수 있다.

주 제 어: 항의운동, 분쟁정치, 동원화, 탈동원화, 푸틴정권

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** Professor at College of International Studies, Kyung Hee University.

1. Introduction

A series of mass rallies and demonstrations took place in Moscow and other cities in Russia in December 2011 and the spring of 2012, protesting against the results of the 2011 Duma elections and the 2012 presidential election. Their demands ranged from an immediate call for new Duma elections and the resignation of Putin to a more fundamental one for democratic political reforms in Russia. Although we have witnessed certain forms of protests occurring continually in Russia since the 2005 monetization reform of the pension system, the recent ones were very different from them. First, the rallies were much larger in size, sometimes with more than a hundred thousand participants. Second, this time, the protesters' demands were political, touching on big issues in national politics.¹⁾

Some observers interpreted those protests as the emergence of a serious threat to the Putin regime, pointing out that we were seeing a mass political protest movement for the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union and a large number of new middle class in Russia participated in the protests. On the other hand, as political protests got dwindled in their size and frequency under the continued, dominant rule of Putin and United Russia as "party of power," skeptics gave much less weight to them almost as a marginal factor in Russian politics. Kremlin tried to weaken and isolate the new political protest movement by taking a variety of repressive and constraining measures toward those people involved with it. And with the rise of the Ukrainian crisis since late 2013, political opposition and protest in Russia witnessed another decrease of their momentum. Nevertheless, the protest movement has so far made strenuous endeavor to bring about meaningful changes in Russian

1) Joan DeBardeleben, "The 2011–12 Russian Elections: The Next Chapter in Russia's Post-Communist Transitions?" in J. L. Black and Michael Johns, eds., *Russia after 2012. From Putin to Medvedev to Putin – Continuity, Change, or Revolution* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 8; Alfred B. Evans, "Civil Society and Protest," in Stephen K. Wegren, ed., *Return to Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), p. 116.

political life through protest rallies and demonstrations and other methods. With the experiences of large political protests, Russian politics cannot go back to the state of affairs prior to their emergence. Accordingly, an appropriate analysis of the recent protest movement is required for a better understanding of political dynamics in Russia.

For this, this paper aims at analyzing the recent political protest movement in Russia from the perspective of “contentious politics” and evaluating its significance as new force in Russian politics by examining the developments of political protests in Russia and their main characteristics such as organization, participants, and strategies. Further, after investigating the diverse responses of the Putin regime to the political protests, it tries to find the achievements and limitations of the protest movement in Russian politics and gauge its future.

There are three main reasons for applying the contentious politics approach to the protest movement in Russia. Firstly, existing works on the subject mainly focus on whether the political protests would offer a serious threat to the Putin regime or not, lacking in a more systematic, theoretical understanding of the dynamic process of the rise and decline of the protest movement.²⁾ Secondly, although Russian protest movement can also be investigated from the “social movement” perspective, the contentious politics approach has some relative merits. First, it pays more attention to the political aspect of the movement by involving the state as a major actor vis-à-vis the movement. Second, the interactive dynamics among the initiators of the movement, participants in the movement, the targeted government, and the third parties become important in the contentious politics perspective. Thirdly, when we understand “political protest” as actions used by groups of people to make demands on the state or private people whose behavior is influenced by the

2) See, for instance, 3 articles written under the special topic of “Putinism Under Siege,” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 23, no. 4 (July 2012), pp. 19-46; 2 articles under the special topic of “Putin versus Civil Society,” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 24, no. 3 (July 2013), pp. 62-87.

state,³⁾ the contentious politics approach with its attention to political interaction is much useful in investigating the protest movement in Russia.

2. Dynamics of Collective Movement in Contentious Politics

In the Western political sociology literature on collective action in society, “contentious politics” is understood to involve “interactions in which actors make claims bearing someone else’s interests” with coordinated efforts, having “governments...involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties.”⁴⁾ Thus it accompanies three main features of social life: contention, collective action, and politics. Here, “contention” means making claims that bear on someone else’s interests, and “collective action” involves coordinating efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs. Finally, “politics” concerns interaction with agents of governments, either dealing with them directly or engaging in activities related to governments.⁵⁾ In this sense, contentious politics is close to “social movement” as a sustained campaign of claim making, using repeated performances advertising the claim, based on organizations, networks, and solidarities.⁶⁾ But it involves more interactive political dynamics by having the dimension of the development of contentious relationships among the parties concerned. In the interaction process of contentious politics, other player besides a political actor, those for whom the actor makes claim, and the government (or the state) is often involved, when both political actor and the government try to bring that player over to their side to their own benefit.

Seen this way, contentious politics unfolds in the form of dynamic, relational interaction among the parties involved.⁷⁾ This dynamic contention is

3) Graeme B. Robertson, *The Politics of Protest in Hybrid Regimes: Making Dissent in Post-Communist Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 18.

4) Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (New York: Paradigm Publishers, 2007), p. 4.

5) Tilly and Tarrow (2007), pp. 4-5.

6) Tilly and Tarrow (2007), p. 9.

7) Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (New

likely to go through a cyclical pattern. The entire process of contentious politics as a movement is composed of the emergence of the movement, its development and diffusion based on mobilization, the exhaustion and demobilization of the movement, and the final outcomes.⁸⁾ Here, “mobilization” means the increase in resources available to a political actor for collective making of claims, and “demobilization” refers to the decrease in those resources.⁹⁾

In the stage of the emergence and development of a movement in contentious politics, three main factors are of great importance: the structure of political opportunities, the forms and structure of mobilizing organization, and framing process. The “political opportunity structure” means changes in the features of regimes and institutions that facilitate or inhibit collective action.¹⁰⁾ “Mobilizing structure” is understood as collective vehicles, both formal and informal, through which people engage in collective action.¹¹⁾ “Framing processes” refer to shared meanings and definitions that people bring to their situation, mediating between opportunity, organization, and action.¹²⁾ These three factors are interactive rather than independent between themselves. Political opportunities are not likely to be seized and utilized in the absence of sufficient organization, and framing processes encourage mobilization as

York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 22-24, 43-45.

8) These phases in the process of contentious politics are based on Tilly and Tarrow (2007), pp. 92-98; Sidney G. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 195-210.

9) Tilly and Tarrow (2007), p. 217.

10) Tilly and Tarrow (2007), p. 49.

11) Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, “Introduction: Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Framing Process – Toward a Synthetic, Comparative Perspective on Social Movement,” in D. McAdam, J. D. McCarthy, and M. N. Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 3.

12) McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1996), p. 5.

people try to organize and act on their growing awareness of the situation.¹³⁾

On the basis of the above dynamics, the process of mobilization of a collective movement is likely to unfold in the following way. Both actors (or challengers) and authorities they faces first engage in the interpretation of the existing situation, and perceive opportunities and threats in the process. And then, both challengers and authorities try to appropriate resources and organizations to take advantage of opportunities and avert threats. While challengers engage in innovative collective action to attract supporters and impress or threaten authorities, the latter endeavors to oppose or threaten the former.¹⁴⁾ In the process, collective movement often undergoes the process of “downward scale shift,” i. e., coordination of collective action at a more local level than its initiation, or “upward scale shift,” i. e., coordination of collective action at a higher level (regional, national, or even international) than its start.¹⁵⁾

With the passage of time, mobilization processes are likely to undergo an eventual process of demobilization. According to Tilly and Tarrow, the manner of this reversing process is highly influenced by the initial conditions of mobilization, the strategy of authorities in response to challengers’ claims, and the degree to which challengers provide themselves with the enduring structures to maintain their solidarity.¹⁶⁾ There can be found several mechanisms and processes that lead to demobilization, i. e., decrease in the resources available to challengers. First, “competition” among different sources of support and the diverging goals of the main actors and their supporters can take place. Second, “desertion” of certain leaders and followers from the movement can also happen as a consequence of “defection” (e. g., change in positions and interests), “disillusionment” (e. g., embitterment with collective action experiences), or “exhaustion” (e. g., weariness of engaging in collective actions). Third, authorities can use various methods of “repression” by taking

13) McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1996), p. 8.

14) Tarrow (2011), pp. 188-189.

15) Tilly and Tarrow (2007), pp. 94-95.

16) Tilly and Tarrow (2007), p. 97.

harsh measures, both direct and indirect, to control challengers. Fourth, authorities can engage in the process of “facilitation” by satisfying some of the claims of challengers, who may retreat from the struggle because of those satisfying measures. Fifth, the process of “institutionalization” is also possible when challengers and their organizations can be incorporated into the mechanism of regular, organized politics.¹⁷⁾

Consequently, authorities (or the government) become closely involved in interaction with challengers (or protestors) from the early stage in the course of mobilization and demobilization of contentious collective movement. In the process, different responses of the state can contribute to different strategies and tactics by protestors. Hence, contentious movements evolve in response to their interactions with supporters and opponents, in particular the government. Outcomes of collective contentious movement are also likely to be determined by the state’s responses to a substantial degree.¹⁸⁾ Nevertheless, it is not easy to evaluate precisely the outcomes of contentious collective movements because of the intervention of many variables with different weight in the process. Thus, moving beyond the immediate outcomes of success or failure, long-term and indirect effects of the movements sometimes deserve attention. They include effects of the movements on the political socialization and future activism of the people joining them, effects on political institutions and practices, and contributions to changes in political culture.¹⁹⁾

As seen above, the “contentious politics” perspective can provide a very useful framework in analyzing major aspects of the Russian protest movement. In the following chapters, we examine the rise and development of the current protest movement in Russia and the responses of the Putin regime to

17) Tilly and Tarrow (2007), pp. 97-98 and Tarrow (2011), p. 190. Some revisions are made regarding their original items by the present author.

18) Jack A. Goldstone, “Social Movements or Revolutions? On the Evolution and Outcomes of Collective Action,” in Marco G. Giugni, Doug McAdam and Charles Tilly, eds., *From Contention to Democracy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), pp. 130, 135.

19) Tarrow (2011), p. 220.

the movement from this perspective of dynamic contentious politics and evaluate its achievements and limitations.

3. Rise and Development of Protest Movement in Russia

Under the Putin regime, a collective movement that started with protesting against the outcomes of the Duma elections of December 2011 continued by holding recurrent protest rallies and demonstrations, though its momentum and influence in Russian politics has been decreasing in the course of its evolution. During the period between December 2011 and the end of 2013, at least 16 significant cases of political protest took place in Moscow, and sometimes in other Russian cities, too. Although those protests showed certain variations in the size of participants and changes in specific demands and slogans, they maintained consistent themes of denouncing the Putin regime for its lack of democracy and arbitrary use of power. Some details of each of 16 protests that took place in Moscow are in the <table 1>.

As seen from this list of mass protests, the protest movement in Russia shows basic characteristics of “contentious politics” examined in the previous chapter. The movement made various claims, including the reelection of the Duma and Russian president, for the interest of Russian people (“contention”). It presented its demands through a series of rallies and demonstrations (“collective action”). In the course of organizing and implementing the protests, the movement was involved in interaction with the state institutions (“politics”). At the same time, the movement engaged in a sustained campaign of claim making through repeated “performances” of street rallies, marches, and demonstrations, like social movement.

<Table 1> Main Protest Rallies in Moscow, 2011–2013

Date	Participant Size *	Main Demand or Slogan
December 5, 2011	5,000	Annulment of elections results; Resignation of Putin
December 10, 2011	25,000 - 80,000	Reelection of Duma; Resignation of Churov (head of election commission); New democratic legislation on parties and election
December 24, 2011	30,000 - 120,000	Reelection of Duma
February 4, 2012	38,000 - 160,000	Reelection of Duma; “Putin, Go Away”
March 5, 2012	14,000 - 20,000	Against Putin’s presidency; “For Fair Elections”
March 10, 2012	10,000 - 25,000	Against Putin’s presidency; “For Fair Elections”
May 6, 2012	8,000 - 100,000	Against Putin’s presidency; “For Russia without Putin”
June 12, 2012	15,000 - 120,000	Annulment of parliamentary and presidential election results; Release of arrested in rallies
September 15, 2012	14,000 - 100,000	Putin’s resignation; Release of arrested in rallies; Utility-price freeze; More investment in education
December 15, 2012	500 - 5,000	Against Putin regime; “March of Freedom”
January 13, 2013	9,000 - 50,000	Against the adoption-ban law
April 6, 2013	500 - 1,500	Release of arrested in rallies
May 6, 2013	7,000 - 50,000	Against Putin regime; “Russia Will Be Free”
June 12, 2013	6,000 - 30,000	Release of arrested in rallies; “Russia without Putin”
July 18, 2013	2,500 - 10,000	Against Navalny’s verdict
October 27, 2013	4,500 - 20,000	Release of arrested in rallies

* Small and large numbers in “participant size” of the rallies respectively indicate the conservative estimate by the police (or the media) and the much generous one by the protest organizers.

** Sources: *BBC News*, 2013.05.06; *Moscow Times*, 2011.12.07, 2011.12.12, 2011.12.24, 2012.02.04, 2012.03.06, 2012.03.11, 2012.05.07, 2012.06.13, 2012.09.15, 2012.12.15, 2013.01.13, 2013.04.07, 2013.06.12, 2013.07.19, 2013.10.28.

Although the Russian protest movement emerged in a much unexpected way, the general circumstances worked quite favorably to its rise in December 2011. It seems to have been the case that the Putin regime made a “social contract” with Russian people — the state’s providing material wealth to the

population with continuous economic growth²⁰⁾ and the latter's acceptance of the existing political order in return — and maintained it for the first decade of the 21st century. Despite this contract, however, the popular discontent with pervasive corruption and illegalities in society and with continuous democratic regression continued to grow, almost getting near to the boiling point. Against this backdrop, serious frauds in Duma elections of early December 2011 contributed to the emergence of a good “political opportunity structure” for those who wanted substantial changes in the political order. Although election rigging had been an almost permanent feature in Russian politics, the degree of fraudulence perhaps went so far this time as to facilitate the gathering of a large number of people for protest rallies.

At this time, there existed a certain “mobilizing structure” that could seize newly emergent political opportunities. In the first decade of the new century, there was formed in Russia a “non-system” opposition composed of anti-regime activists. They were involved with various kinds of anti-government activities, such as “Dissenters’ March” and “Strategy-31,” outside the parliament, in collaboration with politicians from opposition parties. Certain ties and networks were formed by their engagement in various protest activities under such broad coalition body as “The Other Russia.” When some of them, including Navalny and Udaltsov, decided to do something about the fraudulent Duma elections in early December, 2011, this existing structure could be used in productive way.

In this situation, common sentiment was rising among the Russian people that political reality in Russia was going too bad. They felt that the Kremlin continued to exercise arbitrary power without due consideration of people's needs and demands under the Putin's presidency and the Medvedev-Putin tandem. United Russia as “party of power” simply played the role of rubber stamp in the parliament for the president and his group. Against this backdrop, then president Medvedev's announcement in September 2011 that Putin would run in the March 2012 presidential election and Putin's

20) For instance, it was reported that the average Russian enjoyed a 28% annual growth in his or her income from 2000 to 2005. *Moscow Times*, March 26, 2012.

subsequent remark that this arrangement was already made personally between them at the time of Medvedev's assuming the presidency deepened popular dissatisfaction and frustration. When a large scale of fraud and rigging for United Russia in the December 2011 Duma elections was reported by election monitors and in the media,²¹⁾ Russian political reality was "framed" in the way in which the people could not bear it any longer and something should be done by the Russian population for bring in needed corrections. As soon as Navalny ridiculed United Russia as "party of crooks and thieves," it became one of most popular phrases targeted at the current regime.

3.1. Mobilization of the People

Personal feeling of frustration and indignation about the worsening political situation provided a big impetus to driving the Russian people to the protests that started with a rally on December 5, 2011. According to a survey done by the Levada Center for Moscow residents who participated in the protest of December 24, 2011, 72.6% and 72.3% of the respondents mentioned respectively their dissatisfaction with Russian reality (and state policies) and their indignation about the electoral fraud as the reason for joining the protest. 51.6% pointed out as the third main reason their dissatisfaction with state authorities taking no account of the people.²²⁾ Ill feeling of the Russians toward the Kremlin and its policies continued to be visible in that a large number of people participated in a series of protests of December 2011 and the first half of 2012 that targeted Putin and his regime.

One thing that received big attention in the Russian protests was the mobilization of the people by using social network services. Leading activists such as Navalny used various kinds of social networking — e. g., Internet,

21) It was officially announced that United Russia received 49.5% of the total votes in the elections. According to opposition leaders and activists, however, 20 to 25% of the United Russia's votes were fabricated by election officials. *Moscow Times*, December 7, 2011.

22) Anton N. Olenik, "Mass Protests in the Context of the Russian Power Regime," *Russian Politics and Law*, vol. 51, no. 2 (March-April 2013), p. 83, table 2.

Twitters, Facebook, LiveJournal — to bring Moscovites to the rallies and demonstrations. Participants in the protests also relied on the use of social networks in proposing their friends to come to the demonstrations.²³⁾ Considering that more than 40 million Russians were already on line at that time,²⁴⁾ social network service was very efficient and effective in the mobilization of people for collective action by its speed and easy access. For instance, it was reported that it took only a few hours to gather all 5,000 people to the December 4 protest.²⁵⁾ One-third of those who joined the protest of December 24, 2011 were recruited through online media.²⁶⁾

Another salient feature of the Russian protest movement was that majority of those who came to the protests belonged to the newly emerging group of urban dwellers with high educational background, considerable wealth, and professional occupation. Although they came from different ideological camps (liberals, Communists, and nationalists), they shared several features of the Russian version of “middle class.”²⁷⁾ According to the Levada Center survey mentioned above, 70% of the respondents had college degree, and another 13% had completed at least three years of college at that time. 73% of them could afford to buy at least “some expensive things” such as refrigerator and television.(5% were so rich not to refuse anything, and 28% could afford to buy a car.)²⁸⁾ Most of the protesters identified themselves as technical

23) Денис Волков, “Протестные митинги в России конца 2011 – начала 2012 гг.: запрос на демократизацию политических институтов,” *Вестник общественного мнения*, № 2, 2012, с. 80.

24) David Remnick, “The Civil Archipelago: Letter from Moscow,” *New Yorker*, vol. 87, no. 41 (Dec 19-Dec 26, 2011).

25) *Moscow Times*, December 7, 2011.

26) Samuel A. Greene, “Beyond Bolotnaia: Bridging Old and New in Russia’s Election Protest Movement,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 60, no. 2 (March/April 2013), p. 41.

27) In the estimation of Mikhail Dmitriev, expert on Russian society and economy, 40% of Moscow’s population and 20-30% in other big cities are formed by urban middle class. *Financial Times*, September 26, 2011.

28) Leon Aron, “Putin versus Civil Society: The Long Struggle for Freedom,” *Journal*

specialists, middle-level managers, journalists, or students.²⁹⁾ In the past, it was pointed out that much of the Russian middle class kept big concern for material wealth with little interest in politics and democracy. But the participation of a large number of urban middle class in the protests was understood to show that an important social group in Russia started to move for certain political change toward more liberty and democracy.

3.2. Organization of the Protest Movement

At the time of the start of the protest movement, the gathering of the crowd was arranged by activists and politicians on their individual bases. Hence, the protest was loosely organized. Realizing the problems stemming from the absence of a focal organizational center, organizers of the movement decided to set up an Organizational Committee of Protest Action (Оргкомитет протестных действий) at the protest of December 5, 2011. The committee was composed of activists (Aleksey Navalny, Evgeniya Chirikova, etc.), opposition party leaders (Boris Nemtsov, Vladimir Ryzhkov, etc.), journalists (Olga Romanova, Dmitry Bykov, etc.), and cultural people.³⁰⁾ This way, the organizational committee reflected a main feature of the protest movement. That is, a variety of different groups in Russian society formed a movement with a common cause. The main tasks of the organizational committee were defined as follows: collection of meeting fund; provision of stage and equipment; decision on the event and marching route; decision on the number of speakers and candidate speakers; coordination with Moscow city government on the place, time, and form of meeting; giving information on the event plans to society.³¹⁾

Despite the formation of the Organizational Committee, however, the protest

of Democracy, vol. 24, no. 3 (July 2013), pp. 65-66.

29) Lilia Shevtsova, "Putinism Under Siege: Implosion, Atrophy, or Revolution?" *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 23, 3 (July 2012), p. 32.

30) Greene (2013), pp. 41-42.

31) Денис Волков, "Протестное движение в России глазами его лидеров и активистов," *Вестник общественного мнения*, № 3-4, 2012, с. 151.

movement had difficulties in developing a united political agenda and in raising sufficient fund to continue to move.³²⁾ In this connection, the organization committee came to develop itself into a more efficient, better organized leading body with the name of the Coordination Council of Russian Opposition (Координационный совет российской оппозиции) in October 2012. Some of the main tasks of the coordination council were put forward as follows: reaction to current events and civil and political initiative; monitoring of court processes and political persecution and repression; coordination of mass political actions; participation in regional and local election campaigns; participation in checking the whole election process.³³⁾ 45 members of the coordination council were elected for a one-year term by over 80,000 registered people through on-line voting.³⁴⁾ Navalny got most votes. Well-known opposition politicians and activists such as Gary Kasparov, Boris Nemtsov, Sergei Udaltsov, and Evgeniya Chirikova were elected the council members. Although the coordination council was criticized for its lack of inner unity and its failure to secure effective organizing ability, it continued to work forming 10 working groups (e. g., working group on developing program and strategy of the council, on organizing protest actions, on budget) as executive bodies of the committee.³⁵⁾

4. Responses of the Regime and Demobilization Aspects

Protest movement in Russia began to show its gradual weakening after the anti-Putin protest that took place on May 6, 2012, the eve of Putin's inauguration as new president. Although previous protest rallies and

32) *Moscow Times*, August 15, 2012.

33) “О целях и задачах Координационного совета российской оппозиции,” <http://www.kso-russia.org/o-sovete> (accessed December 17, 2013).

34) *Moscow Times*, October 23, 2012.

35) *Moscow Times*, February 13, 2013; “О рабочих группах Координационного совета оппозиции,” <http://docs.google.com/document/d/1EUn...> (accessed December 17, 2013).

demonstrations were held in mostly peaceful way, violent confrontation took place between the police and the crowd at the May 6 protest. As a result, at least 70 people, including more than 20 police officers, were injured, and around 450 protesters were arrested.³⁶⁾ Since this date, Russian protest movement seemed to lose its momentum little by little, which could be seen in the gradual decrease of participants in the protests. Gradual decline of the protest movement in Russia was the result of the various measures taken by the Kremlin against the movement and the spontaneous development of the movement itself alike. This can be examined in terms of the major aspects of “demobilization” of collective movements discussed in the chapter two of the present paper.

4.1. Desertion

Decrease in the number of protesters at the rallies and demonstrations, first of all, came from the increasing weariness of the people of coming to the protest repeatedly in the situation where the almost all of major demands of the protesters were ignored by the Putin regime. For many people, coming to the protest and shouting “empty” slogans — for instance, resignation of Putin — generated disappointment, disillusion, and feeling of exhaustion. Second, the regime tried to distance the possible protest sympathizers from the street rallies by rounding up activists in a series of raid after the Bolotnaya Square demonstration on May 6, 2012 and by presenting the clear message that joining the protest movement was a risky business.³⁷⁾ Third, increasing possibility of the use of violence was another factor to those who wanted the protests to proceed in peaceful way. Lastly, imposition by the government of large amount of fines on individuals participating in unsanctioned rallies and being involved with other cases of public disorder also contributed to the decline of popular willingness to join the protests.³⁸⁾

36) *Moscow Times*, May 7, 2012.

37) Graeme B. Robertson, “Civil Society and Contentious Politics in Russia,” in S. White, R. Sakwa, and H. E. Hale, eds., *Developments in Russian Politics* 8 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 127.

4.2. Competition

Although the protest movement in Russia did not face competition among different sources of support, it was situated in a rivalry with the Kremlin over popular support in society. Since favorable attitude and sympathy toward the protesters among ordinary people could play a very positive role in the development of the movement, the Kremlin made various efforts to isolate the protesters from the population as well as strengthen the latter's support to the regime.

First, the Kremlin engaged in the organization of pro-Putin and pro-government rallies against the mass protests. In the wake of the “color revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine, young Russians had already been mobilized in support of the Putin regime under the guidance of influential youth organizations such as Nashi and Young Guard. Since the rise of the protest movement, the mobilization of Russian people against the protest rallies was initiated by the Kremlin. For instance, on December 5, 2011, Nashi arranged a rally against the opposition protest with its “anti-Orange” slogans. In late December 2011 and February 2012, a series of “anti-Orange” pro-government rallies were organized by the group Essence of Time (Суть времени) with the support of the Kremlin.³⁹⁾ At the rallies, nationalistic slogans were chanted, and support to Putin was identified with love for the nation.

Second, as seen in the case of pro-Putin rallies, the Kremlin tried to isolate the protesters from the population and weaken their appeal by promoting nationalistic, traditional, and conservative values in society. In his yearly address to the parliament on December 12, 2011, a week after the first mass protest, Putin emphasized the importance of patriotism and spirituality (духовность) in consolidating Russian society. In this connection, a new organ, Directorate for Social Project, was established in the presidential

38) This point will be examined in more detail later in the “repression” aspect.

39) Regina Smyth, Anton Sobolev, and Irina Soboleva, “A Well-Organized Play: Symbolic Politics and the Effect of the Pro-Putin Rallies,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 60, no. 2 (March/April 2013), p. 27.

administration in fall 2012. Its main task was to promote and strengthen “the spiritual and moral foundations of Russian society” and to improve government policies on “patriotic upbringing.”⁴⁰⁾ Related to this, the U. S. received special attention as a main enemy. In a press conference right after the first mass protest, Putin criticized U. S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton for encouraging the protest. Later in fall 2012, USAID was expelled from Russia, and in late 2002, a new law banning all U. S. adoption of Russian children was made as a countermove to Magnitsky Act of America. In addition, a variety of measures were taken by the Kremlin for the further cultivation of traditional and conservative values of Russia. While Russia’s unique civilization was emphasized, the Kremlin’s identification with Russian orthodoxy increased. Along this trend, laws on banning the spread of “non-traditional sexual relations” (so-called “Anti-gay Law”) and on forbidding acts of offending religious practitioners (so-called “Blasphemy Law”) were made in the latter half of 2012.

4.3. Facilitation

It seems to have been the case that the Kremlin was really perplexed to see tens of thousands of people gathering at some place in Moscow and shouting anti-government slogans during tumultuous December 2011. One of the early reactions of the regime to these protests was the introduction of some political reforms that apparently responded favorably to the demands made at the protests and contributed to making the Russian political system more democratic.⁴¹⁾ In his annual address to the Federal Assembly on December 22, 2011, two days before a large protest planned by anti-regime activists, then president Medvedev proposed two major political reforms. First, the number of party members’ signatures required to register a new political

40) Leon Aron, “Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth: The Kremlin’s Reactionary Policies,” *Russian Outlook*, American Enterprise Institute, Summer/Fall 2013, p. 2.

41) New democratic legislation on parties and election was one of the five main demands at the protest of December 10, 2011.

party was reduced from 40,000 to 500. By this measure, political parties could be formed much easier than before. This new amendment to the law on political parties became effective in April 2012.⁴²⁾ Despite the restoration of freer political associations, however, the possible emergence of too many small parties could increase fragmentation in the party system. At the same time, the formation of electoral blocs continued to be banned, which would hinder small parties' cooperation in the elections.

Another reform was the restoration of direct election of governors by the people. This was a substantial move toward more democracy, considering that since 2005, governors had been appointed by the president and approved in the regional assemblies. In the course of changing the relevant law, however, two significant modifications, i. e. certain "presidential filter" and "municipal filter," were added. Accordingly, the final bill submitted in the Duma requires that political parties consult with the president before nominating their candidates for governorship and that those approved by the president would face direct election by the regional population. According to the additional "municipal filter" clause, a gubernatorial candidate has to collect the signatures of 5-10% of deputies serving in a region's municipal assemblies to go to the direct election. Consequently, the introduction of the two screening filters made direct election of governors subject to the president's judgment, and the principle of direct election got much damaged. In this respect, it was a product of "interplay between the liberalizing concession and authoritarian corrections."⁴³⁾ Furthermore in April 2013, a new law was made that permits regions to determine whether or not to hold direct gubernatorial elections. In the case of no direct election, the president was to appoint candidates.

42) By this law, 167 organizational committees for various parties were created in Russia as of May 17, 2012. Grigorii Golosov, "Dmitry Medvedev's Party Reform," *Russian Analytical Digest*, no. 115 (20 June 2012), p. 10.

43) Grigorii V. Golosov, "The 2012 Political Reform in Russia: The Interplay of Liberalizing Concessions and Authoritarian Corrections," *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 59, no. 6 (November-December 2012), p. 13.

4.4. Repression

Most active responses of the Putin regime to the protest movement were made by introducing a variety of repressive policies. First, serious restrictions were imposed on street rallies and demonstrations. According to a law that became effective in June 2012, the fine for “violating the public order” was increased to a great extent. Fine of up to \$9,000 is to be imposed on individuals participating in unsanctioned rallies, and up to \$30,000 fine on organizers of those rallies. At the same time, organizers of the event are responsible for the conduct of anybody attending a rally, and fines are imposed if a sanctioned rally has larger turnout than anticipated.⁴⁴⁾ With this law, it became a really serious business for both protest activists and concerned people to organize or join rallies and demonstrations.

Second, NGOs working in Russia came to find themselves in much tougher situation by a new law on NGOs passed in the Duma in July 2012. It stipulates that all foreign-funded NGOs engaging in “political activities” register as “foreign agents” and submit to annual audits by the government. If such NGOs refuse to register, they are to face the threat of closure. As some NGOs announced that they would not register, amendments were made to the law in October 2010. According to them, fines of up to \$16,000 would be imposed on NGOs that failed to register.⁴⁵⁾ It was reported that since the checks on NGOs by government officials began in February 2013, prosecutors checked as many as 2,000 NGOs across the country until June 2013.⁴⁶⁾ Considering that a considerable number of opposition activists were involved with certain NGOs, in particular advocacy groups on human rights and environmental issues, the new law placed significant restrictions on the protest movement.

44) Miriam Lansky and Elspeth Suthers, “Putin versus Civil Society: Outlawing the Opposition,” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 24, no. 3 (July 2013), p. 78.

45) Jim Nichol, “Russian Political, Economic, and Security Issues and U.S. Interests,” *Congressional Research Service*, March 31, 2014, p. 10.

46) *Moscow Times*, April 4, 2013; June 12, 2013.

Along with these direct and indirect measures for suppressing the protest movement, the Putin regime came up with additional measures restricting free communication in society. A law approved by Putin in July 2012 recriminalized defamation by partly restoring a previous law that had de-criminalized defamation.⁴⁷⁾ According to the new law, a penalty of up to \$155,000 could be levied on the case of defamation. Certain worry was raised in that the law could be used for suppressing media reporting on illegal activities of officials. Another law of July 2012 officially aimed at protecting children from harmful Internet materials such as child pornography, drug use advocacy, and extremist materials. According to the law, the government can draw up a blacklist of website that contain those materials and then tell Internet service providers to take necessary steps to remove the offending content. Regarding this law, its ambiguity and a danger of blocking the whole website were pointed out.

5. Achievements and Limitations of Russian Protest Movement

As seen above, the protest movement in Russia has shown its dynamic processes of rise, development, and demobilization since its start in early December 2011. During this period, the protest movement contributed considerably to significant changes in Russian society as well as in the policy orientations of the regime. Like other cases of contentious politics, it has shown its worthy achievements and significant limitations alike.

5.1. Achievements

First of all, the protest movement had huge significance in the development of Russian politics since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It has been a usual understanding among experts on Russian politics that under the Putin and Putin/Medvedev regimes, the Russian population had been preoccupied

47) Nichol (2014), p. 10.

with their daily lives and material well-being with much less interest in political conditions. However, the gathering of a huge crowd in the successive protests in 2011 and 2012 broke this established image. It seemed that getting out of long silence, Russian people finally started to raise their voice against the arbitrary and corrupted political leadership that did not take into account their needs and wishes. Although they did not offer a direct threat to overthrow the regime, their presence on the protest sites may have showed “a growing and broader challenge... at all levels” in society.⁴⁸⁾

In particular, the participation of a large number of Russian middle class in the protests generated an expectation that the classic thesis of Western modernization might be applied to Russian reality.⁴⁹⁾ According to the thesis, economic and social development of a society would lead to political democracy, as members of newly emerging and expanding middle class demand more political rights and liberty after they secure certain level of economic wealth. Although it was strongly suggested that the Russian context was substantially different from the Western pattern, the future direction of the Russian course would receive continuous attention in connection with the protest movement.

Second, the protest rallies contributed to the government's taking certain policies either in positive response to the demands of the protesters or for the purpose of making popular attitude toward the Kremlin more favorable vis-à-vis the protest movement. Medvedev's moves after the December 2011 protests on making the formation of political parties easier and restoring the direct election of governors were the products of the regime's effort in this direction. At the same time, some specific measures were taken by the regime to make the election process fairer before the March 2012 presidential

48) Graeme Robertson, “Protesting Putinism: The Election Protests of 2011-2012 in Broader Perspective,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 60, no. 2 (March-April 2013), p. 22.

49) Денис Волков, *Протестное движение в России в конце 2011 – 2012 гг.: истоки, динамика, результаты* (Москва: Аналитический Центр Юрия Левады, 2012), сс. 33-34.

election. Web cameras and transparent ballot boxes were installed at polling places.⁵⁰⁾ This move was a response to the bitter denunciation of the fraud-ridden Duma elections of December 2011, though the presidential election was subject to the charge of election rigging, too.

Third, facing threat from the protest movement, the Putin regime also came up with certain measures that could woo the population for a better image of the regime in the presence of strong opposition protests. Putin's drive for dealing with a serious problem of pervasive corruption in the state institutions reflected the regime's efforts in this direction. Although there was much skepticism on the sincerity of Putin's move and on the likelihood of the success of anti-corruption measures, the campaign started with a big charge on then defense minister Anatolyi Serdyukov and continued. In trying to distance the population from the protest movement, Putin also courted them with a series of beneficial policies after the May 6 protest in 2012. They included raise of the salaries of state employees, building of kindergartens, provision of apartments, etc.⁵¹⁾ Although these policies worsened the budget problems, it was probably important for him to get more favor from the population.

Fourth, the protest movement brought about certain changes in the attitude of ordinary Russians in the way of more active participation in political and social affairs. For instance, it was reported that in the presidential election of March 2012, 28,000 people volunteered to serve as election monitors. Increasing number of people were participating in online communities, including Navalny's RosPil website, for common political activities.⁵²⁾ Rising activism of Russian citizens contributed to the successes in some local elections in the anti-regime atmosphere. In the election of mayor of Yaroslavl' in March 2012, opposition candidate won over United Russia candidate. In mayoral elections of September 2013, some famous opposition activists showed successful performances. In Yekaterinburg, Yevgenyi Roizman

50) *Moscow Times*, March 16, 2012.

51) *Moscow Times*, May 7, 2013.

52) *Moscow Times*, March 14, 2012.

defeated pro-Kremlin candidate. In Moscow, Navalny surprised the Kremlin by receiving over 27% of the total votes, though he was defeated by United Russia's Sobyenin who just resigned from the mayoral post several months before the election.

5.2. Limitations

Most serious limitations of the protest movement came from a variety of actions taken by the regime. As examined in the previous chapter, diverse measures of “repression,” “facilitation,” and “competition” taken by the Kremlin restricted substantially activities of the protest movement. In addition, both internal problems of the movement and its relations with the population caused difficulties in the successful management of its organizations and people working in them.

First, from the start, the protest movement was composed of the people — leaders and ordinary participants alike — coming from diverse groups with different political ideologies and positions: liberals, leftists, and nationalists, etc. Hence, although they shared a common cause of protest against the regime, it was not easy to form and maintain unity in running the movement. Division of opinion regarding the direction, program, and strategy of the movement continued to take place within the leadership and among participants. For instance, big debate often occurred between moderate people who preferred dialogue over simple denunciation of Putin and hardliners who insisted on radical confrontation with the regime.⁵³⁾ Division within the movement leadership was already visible in the work of early Organizational Committee and continued to happen after the establishment of the Coordination Council. Ideological conflicts, personality clashes, and bureaucratic hassles were not easy to overcome.⁵⁴⁾ Famous opposition activists such as Navalny and Udaltsov and well-known politicians such as Nemtsov

53) *Moscow Times*, December 4, 2012.

54) Marc Bennetts, *Kicking the Kremlin: Russia's New Dissidents and the Battle to Topple Putin* (London: Oneworld, 2014), pp. 185-186.

and Yashin even announced that they would not stand for reelection to the Coordination Council in September 2013.⁵⁵⁾ Regarding the Pussy Riot case, opinion was split between liberals and Orthodox activists and socially conservative Communists.⁵⁶⁾ This inner division led to the difficulties in developing a unified program and in running a well-organized movement.

Second, in the course of holding the rallies and demonstrations, the protest movement came to find its base of popular support weakening. Although the protests were earlier looked upon by the population with favor, popular sympathy gradually decreased. Certain questions posed on the movement such as the occurrence of violence in the protests and empty slogans of overthrowing the government may have been a factor here. According to opinion polls by the Levada center, while 44% of the respondents showed their support to the protest movement after the Duma elections of December 2011, the support level went down to 39% in October 2012.⁵⁷⁾

Third, criticism was also made of the protest movement that it was just focusing on big political issues such as the reelection of the Duma and the resignation of the president without taking account of major concerns of people's daily lives such as health care and utility prices. In this connection, the movement's spatial focus on Moscow and other big cities with neglect of regional and local areas was mentioned as another factor of its limitations. It was argued that by this neglect, regional and local residents were losing their interest in the Moscow-centered protest movement. Hence, talk was made about developing various local projects for improving social and economic rights of the people living there: call for free medicine, freezing utility prices, more educational support, etc.⁵⁸⁾ Although some efforts were made in this direction, they were not enough.⁵⁹⁾

55) *Moscow Times*, September 23, 2013.

56) *Moscow Times*, August 21, 2012.

57) *Moscow Times*, October 9, 2012.

58) Boris Kagarlitsky, "Opposition Needs to Reach Beyond Moscow," *Moscow Times*, May 17, 2012.

59) For instance, utility price freeze and additional investment in education appeared

Fourth, the protest movement's need to reach out to the areas outside large cities is closely related to a more fundamental issue of division of Russia between the metropolitan area and the rest of the country. According to Russian sociologists, there has been growing a big split or cleavage between "Russia 1" and "Russia 2." The former consists of richer, better educated urban dwellers of larger cities, including Moscow and St. Petersburg, and the latter is composed of poorer, less educated residents in smaller cities, towns, and the countryside.⁶⁰ The attitude and values of the two groups are much different from each other. Whereas the metropolitan urbanites are politically more active and much more concerned with political rights and corruption, working class and less educated Russians outside big cities care more about poverty, price, and unemployment. Several factors for this gap can be found in the lifestyles of the latter that are much different from those of the former: less exposure to liberal ideas, lack of interest in "high," national politics, main concern about managing daily lives, and emotional estrangement from metropolitan residents. Hence, in contrast to "Russia 1" people who are likely to constitute the majority of the protest crowds, those of "Russia 2" are much dependent on government subsidies and paternalistically oriented. With about 75 million people — over 50% of the total population —, the latter serves as Putin's largest support base.⁶¹ A great divide in Russian society and the presence of Putin's large constituency have worked as a big obstacle to the spread of the influence of the protest movement in Russia.

on the demand list of the protest of September 15, 2012. *Moscow Times*, September 15, 2012.

60) Greame Robertson, "Russian Protesters: Not Optimistic But Here to Stay," *Russian Analytical Digest*, no. 115 (20 June 2012), p. 4; Leon Aron, "Russia's Protesters: The People, Ideals, and Prospects," *Russian Outlook*, American Enterprise Institute, Summer 2012, p. 11. "Russia 2" is again divided into two components by some Russian scholars such as political geographer Natalya Zubarevich: medium-sized industrial cities and the enormous periphery in small towns and villages. See Richard Sakwa, *Putin Redux: Power and Contradiction in Contemporary Russia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 48.

61) Robertson (2012), p. 4; Aron (2012), p. 11.

6. Concluding Remarks

Seen from the perspective of collective movement in contentious politics, it can be understood that the protest movement in Russia has gone through a dynamic process from its rise and development to decline and demobilization between its start in December 2011 and the present time. During the period from December 2011 to May 2012, the movement showed a high degree of mobilization. A large number of people actively participated in a series of protests targeting Putin and his regime with much enthusiasm. The organization of the movement by activists and opposition politicians on the basis of the existing networks and the use of social media was pretty fruitful. After the protest of May 6, 2012, however, it seems that the movement began to show a certain decline with decrease in the participant size and with less excitement. Since then, the protest movement has shown some feature of the demobilization of the process. Both the movement's own problems such as inner division and focus on big cities and a variety of responses, in particular repressive ones, made by the Kremlin contributed to this decline. A big divide between the metropolitan urbanites and the rest of Russia provided a general atmosphere unfavorable to the protest movement.

Although the protest movement now seems to have reached a certain stalemate, it could be regvanized by serious efforts on the part of its leadership and active participants. First, considering the various factors unfavorable to the spread of the protest movement, it may be necessary to change the basic aim of the movement. Facing repressive measures by the regime and popular reluctance to see violence, it could be an option to pursue a gradual regime change through political reforms instead of seeking a drastic displacement of the current power. Here, as some observers suggest, American civil rights movement can be a model.⁶²⁾

Second, it might be more appealing to protest participants and ordinary people to make the demands in the protest more specific and extending to

62) See, e. g., Aron (2012), pp. 8-9.

social and economic issues. Here, as mentioned earlier, more consistent efforts seem to be needed in turning attention from big, empty political slogans to the practical living issues such as poverty, health care, education, and housing.⁶³⁾

Third, in close connection with this, the Russian protest movement may need to extend to the regional and local levels. As examined earlier, in a dynamic model of contentious politics, it seems desirable for a collective movement starting at the national level to try a “downward scale shift” to the lower levels in its work of mobilization. In Russia, we have recently witnessed the victory of opposition candidates over United Russia candidates in some local elections. Hence, more active involvement by the movement people in the regional and local elections could contribute to producing the positive outcomes of the elections as well as to getting the protest movement closer to the population there.⁶⁴⁾ The movement’s campaign for tackling social and economic problems in small cities, towns, and the countryside would be helpful, too.

A survey conducted by influential Center for Strategic Research in Moscow in 2012 showed that though there existed a sharp divide between metropolitan dwellers and the rest of Russia in their position on the political opposition and protest, — the former’s strong anti-government stance versus the latter’s little interest in the protest movement, — the provincial and rural Russia began to want “a state that works” instead of Putin’s corrupt and ineffective system.⁶⁵⁾ If this finding continues to be valid, a more fertile ground could be provided to the protest movement in Russia when a new golden political opportunity structure emerges as a result of another grave miscalculation — e. g., large election frauds — or policy failure — e. g., continuous economic decline — by the regime.

63) See, e. g., *Moscow Times*, January 22, 2013.

64) See, e. g., Andrew Jarrell, “Local Democracy in Russia: An Antidote for an Aimless Protest Movement,” *Russian Analytical Digest*, no. 118 (2 October 2012), pp. 8-10.

65) Mikhail Dmitriev and Daniel Treisman, “The Other Russia: Discontents Grows in the Hinterlands,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 91, no. 5 (Sep/Oct 2012), pp. 65-67.

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Abstract**Contentious Politics in Contemporary Russia:
Protest Movement of 2011–2013****Park, Soo-Heon***

This article analyzes the recent protest movement in Russia from late 2011 to 2013 from the perspective of “contentious politics.” It evaluates the significance of the protest movement as new force in Russian politics by examining the rise and development of political protests in Russia. Then, on the basis of examining the diverse responses of the Putin regime, it tries to find the achievements and limitations of the protest movement in Russian politics. During the period from December 2011 to May 2012, the movement showed a high degree of mobilization. A large number of people actively participated in a series of protests targeting Putin and his regime, and the organization of the movement on the basis of the existing networks and the use of social media was pretty fruitful. After the protest of May 6, 2012, however, the movement began to show a certain decline with decrease in the participant size and in the degree of excitement, undergoing a demobilization process. Both the movement’s own problems such as inner division and focus on big cities and the Kremlin’s diverse policies, in particular repressive and constraining measures, contributed to this decline. A big divide between the metropolitan urbanites and the rest of Russia provided a general atmosphere unfavorable to the protest movement. The protest movement in Russia could have chances of regalanization by making certain changes regarding its basic goal and strategies in the direction of pursuing a gradual regime change, focusing on more specific political and economic demands, and extending to the regional and local levels.

Key word: Protest Movement, Contentious Politics, Mobilization, Demobilization, Putin Regime

* Professor at College of International Studies, Kyung Hee University.

박 수 현

경희대학교 국제대학 교수. 컬럼비아대학교 정치학 박사. 관심 연구 영역은 러시아의 정치변동, 정당정치, 국가-사회 관계 등이다. 최근 논문으로는 「체제전환기 러시아의 국가와 사회: ‘공공회의소’의 경험을 중심으로」, 「Is “Strong” Really That Bad? Strong Presidency in Russian Politics Revisited」, 「“부대 속의 감자” 또는 “혁명의 코러스”: 마르크스의 농민관 재고찰」, 「러시아연방 중앙-지방관계의 변화: 푸틴의 중앙집권화 개혁의 내용과 평가」 등이 있다. 저서로는 『러시아의 선택: 탈소비에트 체제전환과 국가·시장·사회의 변화』(공저) 등이 있다.

Park, Soo-Heon

He is professor at College of International Studies, Kyung Hee University. He received his Ph.D. in political science at Columbia University. His current research interests are in political changes, party politics, and the state-society relations in Russia. His recent articles are “State and Society in Transformative Russia: The Case of *Obshchestvennaya Palata*,” “Is ‘Strong’ Really That Bad? Strong Presidency in Russian Politics Revisited,” “A Sack of Potatoes or Revolutionary Chorus? Marx’s View on Peasants Reconsidered,” and “Changes in the Center-Periphery Relations of Russian Federation: Putin’s Recentralization Reforms and Their Evaluation.” His recent books include *Choice of Russia: Post-Soviet System Transformation and Changes in the State, Society, and Market* (coauthor).

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